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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KS](#)
SUBJECT: ROH TAPS ANTI-CORRUPTION CZAR TO LEAD MOJ

Classified By: A/DCM Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

SUMMARY

1. (C) In a surprise announcement, President Roh on August 8 nominated Kim Song-ho to be the next Justice Minister. The nomination put an end to a fierce fight between the Blue House and the Uri Party over the fitness for duty of Roh's initial choice for the position, long-time Roh crony Moon Jae-in. Roh's uncharacteristically pragmatic and conciliatory decision is a sign of his waning authority. Roh also named 13 new vice-ministers to various positions in multiple government agencies. END SUMMARY.

JUSTICE NOMINEE KIM SONG-HO

2. (SBU) On August 8, President Roh nominated Kim Song-ho to succeed Chun Jung-bae as Justice Minister. Kim, who served for the past two-and-a-half years as Secretary General of the Korea Independent Commission Against Corruption (KICA), is a native of Gyeongsang Province. Kim graduated from Korea University in 1972 and later received an MA in law from George Washington University in 1987 and a Ph.D from Kunkook University in 2003. He worked as a public prosecutor from 1974 until 2004, when he was appointed to lead the KICA. Importantly, Kim appears to enjoy support from both the ruling and opposition parties. Several Uri Party and GNP officials told us that Kim's nomination would not face opposition from the National Assembly.

3. (SBU) Kim's nomination ended the candidacy of Moon Jae-in, Roh's close friend and former Senior Secretary for Civil Affairs, known to be strongly favored by Roh. Many in both the ruling and opposition parties opposed Moon as another in a string of high-level appointments based on fidelity to the President rather than qualifications for the job. A Blue House official told us on August 8 that Roh backing down from his preference to nominate Moon should not be considered a defeat; rather, the President was accepting the "will of the people." But clearly, it will be seen as another sign of Roh's declining power and influence.

OTHER NOMINATIONS

4. (U) In other August 8 personnel decisions, Roh nominated Kwon Oh-ryong to be Vice Home Affairs Minister and head of the Civil Service Commission; Choi Yang-shik to be Vice Minister of Government Administration and Home Affairs; Park Yang-woo to be Vice Minister of Culture and Tourism; Park Hae-sang to be Vice Minister of Agriculture and Forestry; Lee Eun to be Vice Minister of Maritime Affairs and Fisheries; Chung Hae-bang to be Vice Minister of Planning and Budget; Lee Sun-hee to be Commissioner of the Korea Defense Acquisition Program Administration; and Kwon Dong-ock to be

Commissioner of the Korea Coast guard. These nominations, like the Justice Minister nomination, are not subject to National Assembly confirmation.

COMMENT

15. (C) With the Seoul High Court currently embroiled in a graft scandal (on August 7, prosecutors alleged that a former High Court judge had accepted money and gifts worth over \$100,000) it was prudent for President Roh to select as Justice Minister nominee the ROKG's anti-corruption czar. Kim Sung-ho's nomination will also, to some extent, help mend the rift between Roh and the Uri Party, which strongly opposed the nomination of Moon Jae-in. After being stung by the August 1 resignation of Education Minister Kim Byong-joon, who served for 13 days before being forced out in a plagiarism scandal, the Uri Party was loathe to accept another ill-advised nomination. The Kim nomination was also noteworthy because it was uncharacteristically pragmatic and conciliatory. President Roh has an established record of following his own instincts, often to the chagrin of his own party. Backing down from nominating Moon is another sign of his waning presidential authority in the wake of disastrous local elections and plummeting public support.

VERSHBOW